



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233-0001
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

August 3, 2000

The Honorable Dan Miller
Chairman, Subcommittee on the Census
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6143

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letters of July 24, 2000, and July 31, 2000. Enclosed are the results of a requested review by the U.S. Census Bureau of a Subcommittee Staff Report (July 18, 2000) providing profiles of 15 Local Census Offices (LCOs). Of these 15 offices, six are designated as "early peak," and nine are designated as "late surges" by the Staff Report.

The Census Bureau review confirms our judgment that Census 2000 is a good census in these 15 offices and across the nation. Although no census is without flaws and errors, extensive quality assurance procedures, described in materials submitted to the Subcommittee, are designed to locate such residual problems and to the best of our ability correct them. We continue to apply these procedures across the nation, including the 15 profiled offices. We find no cause to re-enumerate the approximately 2.5 million persons covered by these offices, which, at taxpayer expense, would place an excessive and unwarranted burden on the American people.

In openly sharing the administrative data on which this Report is based, Deputy Director William G. Barron and other senior staff of the Census Bureau repeatedly emphasized to your staff that the data are easily misinterpreted. They require familiarity with current census operations, an understanding of the source data, and knowledge of the variety of circumstances in different local communities in order to draw reasonable and correct conclusions. To avoid misinterpretation of the data, senior Census Bureau staff offered further briefings after your staff reviewed the material.

The cautions and offer to clarify issues in the data were ignored. The resulting Staff Report seriously misrepresents the quality of the census effort in the 15 profiled offices. Widely distributing this Staff Report prior to providing an opportunity to the Census Bureau to explain the data patterns has now led to public confusion about the quality assurance operations of Census 2000. Moreover, the Report calls into question the dedication, honesty, and commitment of literally thousands of Census Bureau employees, and it fails to acknowledge the enormous effort of local leaders and partnership organizations that mobilized public cooperation with Census 2000. So-called "early peak" and "late surges" are attributable to documented operational efforts by the Census Bureau and to exceptional promotion efforts by the local community.

We first comment on the basic data used in the Staff Report. As we noted in our meeting with your staff on July 5, the data presented in the national check-in summary were collected on a real-time basis. They were tabulated for use by field staff with a current understanding of the characteristics of the data as well as information on the actual conditions in LCOs. Every community is different and each LCO reflects that difference. These data cannot be analyzed in isolation or without a comprehensive understanding of the local conditions.

For example, the Staff Report describes deletion rates as "high" that range from 8.1 percent to 21.4 percent. Deletion rates vary widely due to actual conditions and are not an indicator of a "rushed census" or any other kind of census. In general, they reflect a Census Bureau policy to be as inclusive as possible in constructing the Master Address File (MAF). That is, we included potential additions to the MAF even if we suspected they were duplicates of other units. The deletion rates on the national check-in summary reflect any form marked as "delete" by an enumerator. These deletions include addresses identified in previous operations as nonexistent, undeliverable, or duplicate and the enumerators were confirming a previous delete. Because your Staff Report characterizes a wide range of deletion rates as "high," your staff presumably have some independent evidence on what is a "normal" deletion rate. The Census Bureau would, of course, appreciate that evidence and/or the logic on which your staff have come to an independent assessment of what constitutes a high, normal, or low deletion rate.

In addition, we provided your staff evidence that in a number of LCOs, the close-out rate was misleading. In five of the offices where the Staff Report characterizes the close-out rate as "high" the actual rate, calculated from a review of closeout questionnaires for data content, is significantly lower than what is stated in the Staff Report. We provided more accurate information to your staff on July 5, the same day that we provided the national check-in summary report data. On July 11 you requested data from the review of the close-out questionnaires. We provided that information to you on July 19. The staff did not use the correct data, choosing instead to report data that had been documented as incorrect.

For partial interviews and refusals, the Census Bureau views high outliers as problematic and reviews them in the context of local knowledge. In the 15 offices profiled, we did not find that the partial interview and/or refusal rates were outside the range that could be explained based on knowledge of local conditions. Your staff evidently has come to an independent conclusion regarding what is a "high" rate of refusals or partial interviews. If your staff will share with the Census Bureau the evidence and/or logic on which their conclusion is based, we will conduct further reviews with these new criteria in mind.

Chairman Miller, you have chosen to describe Census 2000 as a "rushed census." During my appearance before the Subcommittee at the June 22, 2000, hearing on Census 2000 operations, when I could have responded to that charge, you and other majority members of the Subcommittee chose largely to focus on an action of the Secretary of Commerce—an action which had little to do with current census operations. Questions were not asked about offices I had identified as requiring limited re-enumeration. Nor were they asked about our Coverage Edit

Follow-up Operation or our Coverage Improvement Follow-up Operation. Because the term "rushed" is pejorative, I regret that there has been no opportunity to address the charge in testimony, under oath.

Also, for your information, I am enclosing the testimony that was in preparation at the time the Subcommittee hearing scheduled for July 26, 2000, was canceled.*

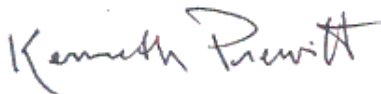
That testimony addresses the Census 2000 progress in two major ways. First, it sets forth the reasons we were able to complete Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU) earlier than the date indicated on the Master Activity Schedule (MAS). The primary reasons, of course, were that the workload was substantially lower than planned for. NRFU was completed close to the date that would have been used in the MAS, had we planned for the mailback response rate that actually occurred. If you are using the term "rushed" in connection with NRFU completion, I believe this fails to consider the full implications of an approximately 10 percent reduction in workload.

Second, the testimony outlines the numerous operations that continue, including supplemental operations that we believe will make a good census even better. For example, we have added a major effort to revisit approximately 750,000 housing units classified as occupied in NRFU but for which a population count was not obtained. These operations, both planned and supplemental, suggest the opposite of a "rushed" census; they indicate ongoing, close attention to every procedure that can increase coverage and/or improve data quality. Again, I regret that there has been no recent opportunity to present to the Subcommittee information on the many current and ongoing efforts to ensure that the census is as accurate and complete as possible within the time constraints imposed by the requirement to provide apportionment counts by December 31, 2000, and redistricting counts by April 1, 2001.

This letter does not address questions of "fraud" or "falsification," which the Census Bureau is independently assessing in close cooperation with the U.S. Department of Commerce's Inspector General's Office.

If you require any further information, please have a member of your staff call Ms. Robin Bachman, Chief of the Congressional Affairs Office, at (301) 457-2171.

Sincerely,



Kenneth Prewitt
Director

Enclosures

The Honorable Dan Miller

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cc: The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Richard Gephardt, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
Mr. J. Kenneth Blackwell, Co-Chairman, Census Monitoring Board
Mr. Gilbert Casellas, Co-Chairman, Census Monitoring Board
Mr. Johnnie Frazier, Inspector General, Department of Commerce
Mr. J. Christopher Mihm, Associate Director, General Accounting Office
Ms. Janet Norwood, Chair, Panel to Review the 2000 Census

*This written testimony is the draft version prepared as of July 23, 2000, and does not necessarily represent the exact formulation that would have been presented on July 26, 2000. Your staff stated that the July 26 hearing was canceled because the Census Bureau would not have had time to reply to issues raised in the July 18 Report, subsequently transmitted to us on July 24. Had that Report been shared with us on July 18, we could have prepared a response for the scheduled hearing on July 26. You will note that the draft testimony does address Hialeah as well as the five other local census offices in which limited re-enumeration has been initiated: Chicago West, Chicago Near North, Marion County (IN), Rockville (MD), and Monrovia (CA).